



**The role of education in promoting inclusive societies: A roundtable discussion
with Irina Bokova, Director-General, UNESCO**

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Irina Bokova



Irina Bokova, born on 12 July 1952 in Sofia (Bulgaria) has been the Director-General of UNESCO since 15 November 2009, and was successfully reelected for a second term in 2013. She is the first woman and the first Eastern European to lead the Organization.

As Director-General of UNESCO, Irina Bokova is actively engaged in international efforts to advance gender equality, quality education for all, and combat terrorist financing by preventing the illicit traffic of cultural goods. A leading champion in the fight against racism and anti-Semitism, Bokova has spearheaded UNESCO's activities on Holocaust remembrance and awareness and is the first Director-General of the Organization to appoint a Special Envoy for Holocaust Education.

She is a leading advocate for ensuring quality education for all and has championed gender equality, making this her own personal priority for the Organization. Other fields of action include enabling scientific cooperation for sustainable development, such as early warning systems for tsunamis or trans-boundary water management agreements and global advocacy for the safety of journalists and freedom of expression.

Having graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations, and studied at the University of Maryland (Washington) and the John F. Kennedy School of Government (Harvard University), Irina Bokova joined the United Nations Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria in 1977. In charge of political and legal affairs at the Permanent Mission of Bulgaria to the United Nations in New York, she was also member of the Bulgarian Delegation at the United Nations conferences on the equality of women in Copenhagen (1980), Nairobi (1985) and Beijing (1995). As Member of Parliament (1990-1991 and 2001-2005), she advocated for Bulgaria's membership in EU and NATO and participated in the drafting of Bulgaria's new Constitution.

Irina Bokova was Minister for Foreign Affairs a.i., Coordinator of Bulgaria-European Union relations and Ambassador of Bulgaria to France, Monaco and UNESCO and Personal Representative of the President of the Republic of Bulgaria to the “Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie” (OIF). As Secretary of the Council of Ministers for European Integration and as Foreign Minister a.i., Irina Bokova has always advocated for European integration. She is a founding member and Chairman of the European Policy Forum, an NGO created to promote European identity and encourage dialogue to overcome divisions in Europe. This is an example of her work to endorse the values of dialogue, diversity, human dignity and human rights. Irina Bokova is Executive Secretary of the Steering Committee of the UN Secretary-General’s Global Education First Initiative (GEFI) and co-Vice-Chair of the Broadband Commission.

Irina Bokova has received state distinctions from countries across the world and is Doctor Honoris causa of leading universities.

In addition to her mother tongue, she speaks English, French, Spanish and Russian. She is married with two grown children who live and work in the United States.